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Gender/Women

Throughout history, matters concerning the role of sexes and the function of women in society prove themselves to be fundamental thematic elements in the appreciation of past civilizations. Though not static, male dominance is the prevailing hierarchical archetype (A Textual Journey), and in light of *The Laws of Manu*, *Hammurabi’s Code*, *Justinian Code*, and *From the Sunnah*, one may note the comparative depiction of women’s guise in societies separated by time and geography.

In each of these textual guidelines for society, men are tasked in the leadership of their wife and home. Without regard to age, by Manuan law, a female is never to be independent of a man, be it the woman’s father, husband, or sons in the death of the former (54). In conjunction with *From the Sunnah*, a woman is expected to be virtuous and worship her husband as a god, living only to appease her husband in this life to be exalted in the next (55, 184). Though, in this respect, only vaguely similar, *Hammurabi’s Code* profoundly abhors adultery. Despite this fact, this code implies that a duty of a husband to his wife as the leader of the home is to provide; if he is imprisoned, “and there is no food in his house”, his wife may “enter the house of another…[without] blame” (10).

Akin to *Hammurabi’s Code*, the *Justinian Code* gives rights to women. While Manuan and Sunnan law requires the weaker sex to be passionately subservient to their husbands (55, 185), the aforementioned codes allow women basic human rights. *Justinian Code* refers to these rights as “natural law”, relating animalistic tendencies, such as the union of male and female and the preservation of species, to the treatment of another human being (153). This, however, does not dismiss the hierarchy of male dominance; a woman under this jurisdiction may not participate in certain legal affairs, such as adoption (161). *Hammurabi’s Code* dictates that, in divorce or separation in which the woman bares no fault, she may leave her husband with her dowry unadulterated, and remarry if she so chooses (10, 11).

In Manuan and Sunnan law, a virtuous woman is elucidated as one who adheres to her husband without omission (55, 185). In doing so, she may “enter into paradise” alongside her husband (56, 185). Possibly because Manuan politics and religion are so strictly integrated, a woman’s remarriage even after the death of her husband, is not customary, nor tolerable. Acts of this nature “[are nowhere] prescribed for virtuous women” (55). “A virtuous wife who, after the death of her husband, constantly remains chaste reaches heaven.” (55)

Though estranged to each other by the dictated forces of nature, the disposition of women maintains striking parallels within their respects.